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BY PETER VIERECK

*The First Morning: New Poems*

*Shame and Glory of the Intellectuals: Babbitt Jr. vs. the Rediscovery of Values.* Published by Beacon Press, Boston, 1952. A discussion of the American value-framework.

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*Conservatism Revisited: The Revolt against Revolt, 1815-1949.* Published by Charles Scribner's Sons, N. Y., 1949. British edition by John Lehmann, Ltd., London, 1950. An essay of inquiry into traditionalist ethical and political foundations.

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THE  
FIRST  
MORNING

All's back and forth. Slave-bound by back and forth.  
But once, right here, I'll twist beyond that cycle. . . .  
Rainbowing out in careless cataract  
In the first morning's serpentine first fling,  
Laughing and splashing in the crazy air.

—from "Arethusa: The First Morning," page 17

# THE FIRST MORNING

New Poems

BY

PETER VIERECK



*CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS, NEW YORK*

*1952*

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PETER VIERECK

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I

STANZAS IN LOVE WITH LIFE  
AND AUGUST







## STANZAS IN LOVE WITH LIFE AND AUGUST

### *i*

What can this wind do to these August leaves?  
It folds their ears back on the shaggy bough.  
Back, back and forward. Rippling weather-vane.  
Does this, but nothing worse than this, although  
Juggles them like a wave that jumps upon  
Seven slower waves to pound apart their foam  
In a thousand drops for still more later waves  
To squeeze together in one undertow.  
Apart, together; apart, together again;  
Not once in August shall one leaf blow down.  
Let winds be fiddled by the grass they comb;—  
What else can winds do to these August leaves?  
Green ankles, kick as crazy as you choose,  
For none shall tumble until August does.

A pair of slight tennis shoes is hurrying by in August.

Here's life-besotted, writhing rhododendron,  
Stretching its sinewy sap in every pore,  
Drowsy and fierce, like a great carnivore  
Lunging in one green leap upon the sun.  
Untamed? Yet all its jungle-grossness fawns  
Before two passing slight white cotton socks,  
Disheveled perfume, and a burr-starred smock.  
For an hour, peace and rage and the music of growth are  
one.

Is hurrying by in August.

Inexhaustible waterfalls of green splash up  
Crazily, in dark directions lavished,  
Rippling through blue veins under cotton blouses  
A resonance from lutes beneath the loam.  
Down, death; down like a spaniel;  
Down, wind; down, she said.  
For one whole hour nobody can harm a leaf.

Hurrying by in August.

The winds? Can only harm what's pale and outward;—  
How dark and deep the green of August glows!  
What can a wind do to an August leaf?  
For an hour, kick just as crazy as you choose.  
“But if you hear far unseen apples thud?”  
What is it to us? Those cannot tug us down,  
This being August.

August, glow slow, glow long.

Hurrying by.



(Vulnerable August, deaf to all but fountains.)  
She paused. Who hoped and touched? She hurries by.  
She wears a blouse of cotton summerwhite  
—(Is it fountains, listen, or the first torn fruit?)—  
And tennis shoes.

Can you see a thud, can you hear green fading?  
Glow slowly, holy foliage; apple-red is  
Unasked for in this lute-fed, loam-thick hour.  
. . . Another thud; closer.  
Menace is the name of the small breeze between the leaves.  
. . . Closer.

Turning-point.

A pair of slight tennis shoes hurries by in August.

How dark, how deep the green of August glows!  
 Thinks not of all the death it fed upon.  
 Thinks not of all the life its death will feed.  
 One hour—O deepening foliage, sweep of lawn,  
 Heavy green of August—pause before you're gone.  
 Life-scented, knee-deep-hugging, eerie grass,  
 Good bluegreen spruce, free unpruned hedge and heath,  
 Calm moss, wait long. Glow long enough for us,  
 Petal of the pond-scum, drowner's floating wreath,  
 Whose bees are frogs in emerald flowers. Slow moss,  
 Glow long. Deep-breathing, flush-cheeked August, bleed  
 Your ebb's arterial green in slower tide  
 Back down into the loam you lean upon.  
 We pause as long an hour as August does;  
 Crisscrossed in dark directions overhead,  
 Hot comets hurt each other as they pass;  
 Cold moles grub past each other underneath;  
 All pause as short an hour as August does.  
 Eyes have met eyes while all that green stood still;  
 Though it took but one small breeze to snap that spell,—  
 When eyes pass eyes as dark as August glows,  
 Eyes shall glance backward after August goes.

## II

### PASTORALS





## ARETHUSA: THE FIRST MORNING\*

\*This was the Phi Beta Kappa poem, read at the celebration of the 175th anniversary of the founding of Phi Beta Kappa, at William and Mary College, 1951.

(One of the lesser sea-nymphs, pursued by Alpheus, was changed by Artemis into the spring of Arethusa in Sicily. Let us imagine such magic suddenly transferring life and consciousness from this young girl into these hitherto inanimate waters.)

i

Around the curve where all of me that fountained  
Leans over, stretches out and is a stream,  
And loiters back the long, the round-about,  
The sweet, the earth-way back to sea again—  
At just that curve I woke.

What is awakeness?

Is it a thing? Does knowing mean I own it?  
Before this flash, I sleepwalked through my cycle:  
Sea, fountain, stream, then waterfall to sea,  
While never feeling how it feels to feel.  
I have no memories of what came before.  
Was I ever, ever anything but water?  
I have no memory except of quickness,  
A silver-sandy-gliding-cold delight.  
What brings this "life" that no one gets by taking?  
Who lives it? I ripple stronger yet less free:  
A wet awareness; a pulse of glass; a panting;  
A tear of longing on a cheek of loam.  
Life is one kind of death. Before my waking,  
I felt no dying. Alive, I die at every throb.

Is being alive just something to get used to,  
Or always startling, like hoofprints on my mirror?  
I fiercely sensed four petals; sensed a doe.  
Crossing me. Knee-deep within my foam.  
I need no eyes. What stream could mistranslate  
Such script of harmlessness, all trembling, trembling?  
Harmlessness has a touchable soul, a heart-beat,  
A tang of faltering and fear and fur.  
I splashed those moss-mild willowy shanks and knew her;  
Softer than snails and all my little stones;  
Warmer than fish or lilies; good to know.  
Soft warmth in my cool softness. Crossed and gone now.  
Two sisters, cycles tangent never again.  
We want to wait . . . because we want to wait.  
Or going, can't we go a while together?  
But soilward, seaward, each gropes graveward separately.



A kind of bouncing between clouds and clay:  
 I'll wake out of awakeness into sleep,  
 I'll sleep back through and out of sleep again,—  
 All's back and forth. Slave-bound by back and forth.  
 But once, right here, I'll twist beyond that cycle.  
 One instant shimmering *free* of it, I am  
 The graceful spray beneath the lace of sunlight,  
 The glint of sparks upon the hinted spray,—  
 Rainbowing out in careless cataract  
 In the first morning's serpentine first fling,  
 Laughing and splashing in the crazy air.  
 Faster. I skid between the rocks like wind  
 Between the leaves. I skim the rocks so lightly  
 I now seem less a river than a breath.  
 O! I have become a newness: a river of air.  
 Or is this rapture nothing but a signal  
 (How can I know yet, being so young awake?)  
 That I have reached my final waterfall?  
 I want to stop because I want to stop.  
 Too late, too late. One blue waits here below,  
 The other above. A million million toes  
 Of dew creep up and stub against the stars,  
 Up, up like centipedes on ladders of light.  
 Sun helps them up, sea yields them up, the clouds  
 Give back. Is this the end, or the beginning?  
 Green-dreamy drifts and lulls below, goodbye;  
 Intimate river-bed, joy of the realness of touching,  
 Clinging to me you never will climb with me now.  
 Now one last jump—

I clear the rocks—

I fall

To rise. I think I'll find no hoofprints on the sky.

## TO BE SUNG

### I

If blossoms could blossom  
One petal of petals  
To whom all other blooms are  
As leaves are to flowers,  
It would be to the others  
As you are, my daughter,  
To all other daughters  
Whom songs are adoring.  
For what am I here for  
If not to make love-songs  
Of all the world's beauty  
Whose birthday we share?

### 2

If purest of fragrances  
Brewed a quintessence  
Too delicate-lonely  
To ever be breathed,  
It would be to the others  
As you are, my daughter,  
To all other daughters  
Whom songs are encircling.  
For what am I here for  
If not to weave lassoes  
Of song for the lonely  
To tug them to love?

## 3

Say yes to the breezes.  
 If any dishevels  
 One curl of a ringlet,  
 I'll know and be with you.  
 The grace-notes that feather  
 The wing-beats of longing  
 Are lead till they heal with  
 Their singing your crying.  
 For what is a song for  
 If not to smooth ringlets  
 Of daughters too hurt by  
 The prose of the world?

## 4

When storms replace breezes,  
 No hurt can have healing.  
 Then the love I now sing you  
 Can pillow your fading.  
 For what am I here for  
 If not to link fingers  
 With daughters whose wistfulness  
 Worlds never answer?  
 For what is a song for  
 If not to stretch hands out  
 To signal the falling,  
 "You're never alone"?

When the Camp says: "Dig graves now,  
We're coming to shoot you,"  
I'll help with your shovel  
—(I'll know and be with you)—  
To give you more seconds  
To look up from digging  
To look at the sun while  
I pillow the sand out.  
For what is love here for  
If not to smooth ditches  
For all the world's daughters  
Whose dying we share?

## SONNET ON THE SOUL OF MAN

(“Every day, with statistical regularity, somebody is somewhere or other choosing suicide by drowning in sea water.”)

Through this mild mist I let your hostile spray  
Gnash harmless at my shoe, my shin, my knee.  
You'll never bark loose, O rhetoric-swollen sea,  
From Law whose leash of moonlight tugs your spray.  
These foaming, mad-dog lunges of your spray  
Affright not man, who sidesteps elegantly  
To trick you into docile industry  
And flog his engines faster with your spray.

Small numerals muzzle your immensity  
And code your passion's meteorology;  
You (down, dog, down!) have Law. Are *known*. Man's  
fluttery  
Fidgety wisp of soul alone stays free—  
And lawless, law-giving, conquering, armed with the key  
To all but itself, breaks daily in your spray.

*Harwich Port 1950*

## AGAIN, AGAIN!

Who here's afraid to gawk at lilacs?  
Who won't stand up and praise the moon?  
Who doubts that skies still ache for skylarks  
And waves are lace upon the dune?  
But flowering grave-dust, flowerlike snow-dust,  
But tinkling dew, but fun of hay,  
But soothing buzz and scent of sawdust  
Have all been seen, been said—we say.

BANALITY, our saint, our silly:  
The sun's your adverb, named "Again";  
You wake us with it willy-nilly  
And westward wait to tuck us in.  
We, nurse, are flouted when we flout you.  
Even to shock you is cliché.  
O inescapable and dowdy!  
O gold uniqueness every day!

Who's new enough, most now, most youngest  
Enough to eye you most again?  
Who'll love the rose that love wore longest,  
Yet say it fresher than quick rain?  
I'll see. I'll say. I'll find the word.  
All earth must lilt, then, willy-nilly  
And vibrate one rich triple-chord  
Of August, wine, and waterlily.

## EVERY ARTIST'S SECRET DREAM-ALLEGORY FOR AMERICA

*i* (with a guitar to Jane)

"Not sweat, not plow make soil bear fruits;  
Soil serves where witchcraft woos and blesses.  
Petals, blessing, wake dead roots.  
Petals, wooing, catch in tresses."

So sang the poet's secret, which  
Is really secret envy, which  
Is really hate, is really love,  
Is really tug of love for love.

"Petals, blowing, bless dead roots.  
Petals, blowing, woo live tresses.  
Soil serves where sorcery caresses.  
No flowerless toil can tease forth fruits."

So sang the lonely one again  
To girl and guardian, sowing grain,  
And asked her, when she mocked his chanting,  
"Why does your farm forbid rose-planting?"

ii (she giddily-piously)

"My guardian is, as guardians always are,  
A dragon. But a baker by profession.  
It is a treat to watch my dragon roar.  
But ah, to watch him bake—there's my obsession.

"He just plain simply bakes and bakes and bakes.  
Why? Better hungry hearts than stomach-aches.  
We hug Restraint with madly sane abandon.  
What mystic hot heavens of Cool Fact descend on

"Our orgies of ecstatic Utility!  
In bread-carousals drunk with Soberness, we  
Bake, bake, and never stop—except to weed  
Roses. . . . Go, poet, and on roses feed."



*iii* (on his knees, crooning;  
voice breaks wistfully at "just no more")

"I'll yet touch petal-tangled hair;  
When witchcraft fondles soil with rhyme,  
You'll beckon me in petal-time,"  
So sang the fearless to the fair;

"A petal-tingling, rose-incited ache,  
Maybe just no more . . . than tangency of hair  
To a breeze so sleepy it dangles like musk in the air,  
Will waken you to beckon me to wake.

"Maybe just no more . . . than vintage that sighs have  
pressed  
From aërial grapes of silence grown ripe inside.  
Maybe light as the whim of quick push of breasts against  
breast.  
And you'll be my contour, my landscape, my American  
bride."

So sang what thousand, thousand secret loves?  
So sang the rich twilight of what envious mood?  
So sang what hates that are tugs of loves for loves?  
Maybe just only so . . . is how America is wooed.

*iv* (kind of like October 28, 1929 again)

"Come back no earlier than the time  
When flour," she laughed, "needs yeast of rhyme." . . .  
Crops failed. The furious soil played treason.  
Who starved? He came a later season:

From thriving crops he saw them wave,  
Young petals waving everywhere.  
White petals on what baker's grave?  
Red petals beckoning from whose hair?

## FOUNTAIN RHYTHMS

(Fontana di Trevi, Rome)

### I

Forgetfully  
My fountains play  
Glass symphonies  
To arm my peace.  
Such tides efface  
Such tunes replace  
An older peace,  
My other days,  
Of you the day.

Rebelliously  
Resounding out  
Of mountains came  
Marvel: a shout:  
*"I am the same."*

Who is that singing  
Through my song?

Reluctantly  
Returns at last  
Memory,  
Monody.  
Wild with a lilt  
Fountains lack  
(They never burn),  
Love turns back,  
You return:  
*"I waited long;  
I never changed."*

Implacably  
Your unestranged  
Unrest came:  
A shout: "*The same!*"  
Out of the mountains  
Echoing.

How fragilely  
Now suddenly  
These arms of glass  
Grove, grope and miss,  
Rippling with doubt.  
Splashed by a shout,  
These futile fountains  
Cannot sing.



### III

## THE BIRTH OF SONG\*



\*Except for this section, no poem in this book has appeared in my earlier books. But in this section about poets, the point is to integrate eight poems that in many cases appeared separately earlier but that belong logically in a single batch. For they all explore the preconditions of song. The first is a new poem; some of the older ones are here revised and retitled.





## CHORUS OF THE TRUE UNNOTICED POETS

### I

It is a curse. Our fingers fade away,  
And no one thanks us that the rhythms stay.  
For this we earn your mean and daily No.

Some perchers safely grace the wrists of kings.  
We sing the tumult of storm-wearier breasts.  
For this we earn humiliating crusts.

Expose, expose: "Red ink is all he sings.  
Come read our blood." This is unbearable:  
That even a single passer-by should love

Not us, not every least last syllable.

We gallivant on sidewalks made of air;  
We chirp true insults, but they reach no ear;  
And though Troy's Helen now is passing by

And swaying to our tunes unknowingly,  
It is as when ghost touches living thigh:  
Our love unnoticed though we wrote the play.

The fingers fade. The wines, the blood-wines stay.  
We are those vines that tell the pampered goat:  
"We'll bear—though now you crassly gnaw our root—

Libations when the priest shall cut your throat."

## SMALL PERFECT MANHATTAN

Unable to breathe, I inhaled the classic Aegean.  
Losing my northern shadow, I sheared the noon  
Of an almond grove. The tears of marble  
Thanked me for laughter.

Shapes! And "Release, release" rustled the quarries;  
"One touch will free the serenity locked in our stones.  
But archipelagos of olives  
Distracted me shorewards,

Where sails were ripening toward an African sleep.  
This south wind was no friend of the wind of harps.  
Not destiny but destination  
Incited the grain-ships.

"Nevertheless be of cheer," said a jolly skipper;  
"I sell sick goats that once were deft at flutes.  
The lizard who now is proconsul of Carthage  
Will bury you sweetly."

Then No to sweet Charon. Then home—then not to Sahara,  
The elephants'-graveyard of classics—ascended the singing  
Green I wove just the size of the brow of  
Small perfect Manhattan.

*Athens, 1949*

## INCANTATION AT ASSISI

### *I*

Yesterday, a rose.

Tomorrow, only a leaf the color of roses.

When a new sacrament is invented, eighth, an eighth,

Its name will be Regret-That-Undoes, an agent, marvelous,  
a magic:

To salvage foundered sincerities from reefs of desolate  
embracing,

To get, to get back

by praising, by praising.

Prayer, delicate,

the vesper instant:

Fold, fold your hands till the air they prison

Changes to a dove as the great gongs shudder.

Clench it lightly and lightly—vulnerable whiteness;

Love that eluded alleys and implorings

Is pearled in these two oyster-shells of prayer.

"Then adjourn, adjourn," whisper the vespers,

"To that farther side of skies.

After the red rose, the red leaf; but

Always somewhere the white love, wooing

You deathward—till your love un-dies."

Different:

Here abstractions have contours; here flesh is wraith;  
On these cold and warming stones, only solidity throws no  
shadow.

And wrists are echoes of the chimes they ring.  
(Listen, when the high bells ripple the half-light:  
Ideas, ideas, the tall ideas dancing.)

This is Assisi, this is

a different love and the same;

What twelve years squandered in boulevards and gropings  
Was wine poured for  
ghosts. You

Will get it back in Umbria tonight.

## SOME LINES IN THREE PARTS

(Credo: the winged ego, caged in so ridiculously vulnerable a mortality as the human forehead, must change its mask to be free: from bird of wisdom into bird of song. But classic song, beautiful song—as opposed to romantically pretty song or materially useful song or wholesomely reassuring song—is outwardly terrifying as much as inwardly decorous.)

i

One tawny paw is all it takes to squash  
This owl who nests in brows his grounded stare.  
What ailed me from the arsenals of shape  
To rent so armorless a pilgrim's cape?  
And who am "I"? Were I all soul, I'd smash  
Through this poor pelt—through, out, no matter where,  
Just to wrench free one instant. Or else, I'd hoot  
With hideous ululations—"let me out!"—

Straight up at Such as cooped me here:  
*"How did you get me into such a scrape?"*

But "I" being less than soul, of dustier plume:  
 If I escape, it is myself I lose.  
 Great hooting flapping ruffled ego, close  
 Your hopeless wings again and bless aloud—  
 Seeing only song flits through—this slandered home,  
 This sweet snug roost built from such stinking trash.  
 Sing out its theme (there never was but one),  
 Throw back your head and sing it all again,  
 Sing the bewildered honor of the flesh.  
 I say the honor of our flesh is love.  
 I say no soul, no god could love as we—  
 A forepaw stalking us from every cloud—  
 Who loved while sentenced to mortality.  
     Never to be won by shields, love fell  
 O only to the wholly vulnerable.



What hubbub rocks the nest? What panic-freighted  
 Invasion—when he tried to sing—dilated  
 The big eyes of my blinking, hooting fowl?  
 A cartilaginous, most rheumatic squeak  
 Portends (half mocks) the change; the wrenched bones  
     creak;

Unself descends, invoked or uninvited;  
 Self ousts itself, consumed and consummated;  
 An inward-facing mask is what must break.  
 The magic feverish fun of chirping, all  
 That professorial squints and squawks indicted,  
 Is here—descends, descends—till wisdom, hoarse  
 From bawling beauty out, at last adores,  
 Possessed by metamorphosis so strong.  
 Then, with a final flutter, philomel—  
 How mud-splashed, what a mangy miracle!—  
 Writhes out of owl and stands with drooping wing.  
 Just stands there. Moulded, naked, two-thirds dead.  
 From shock and pain (and dread of holy dread)

    Suddenly vomiting.

Look away quick; you are watching the birth of song.

## THE SLACKER APOLOGIZES

"An artist is a philistine despite himself, a patriotic moralist with a bad conscience. When his art shouts 'beauty,' his conscience shouts 'duty.' Solution unsatisfactory."

—*The Mannelbaum Philosophy*

We trees were chopping down the monsters in the  
Street to count their rings.

WHO BLESSED OUR WAR? The oak invoked: "Within Thee  
Crush, Mother, quakingly these red-sapped things  
Whose burrowings  
Wrong Thy good dirt. Kill, kill all alien kings."

Crowned by black moss or by obscener yellow,  
The flowerless monsters stood  
On soil-blaspheming asphalt. How they'd bellow  
Each time we hacked them—just as if their crude  
Numb root-pairs could  
Feel feeling. O Goddess, the glory of being wood!

Then games of peace. WHO WAS THE POET? I!  
I was the willow lyre.  
Even the oak was silent; melody  
Maddened whole meadows like a forest-fire  
To hear my choir  
Of leaves beat, beat, and beat upon each wire

Of winds I tamed and tuned so artfully  
It seemed an artless game.  
You!, weed back there!, don't think I didn't see  
You yawning. Bored? Well, try to do the same!  
What? Suddenly lame?  
Come, come, step up and sing—or wither in shame.

Then crooned the crass young weed: "*Last night my stamen  
Could hear her pistil sigh.*  
*Though far the garden that her petals flame in,  
We touched in dreams the hour that bee flew by.*  
*My pollen's shy*  
*Deep nuzzling tells her: weeds must love or die.*"

Fools. How they cheered. But wait, I set them right:  
"Verse, verse, not poetry.  
Jingles for jungles: grosser groves delight  
In honey; but educated tastes decree  
Austerity.  
True art is bitter, but true art sets free.

"True art—how can I serve thee half enough?  
Had I a thousand sprays  
And every spray a thousand sprigs, they'd sough  
For beauty, beauty, beauty all their days—  
And still not praise  
Not half the whirlwind-wonder of thy ways."

At this the oak, our captain, roared me down:  
"Mere beauty wilts the will.  
Why are we here? To sing and play the clown?"  
The forest answered: "We are here to kill."  
. . . While monsters still  
Defile Thy loam, while trees know right from wrong,  
Forgive me, Mother, for the guilt of song.

# THE SLACKER NEED NOT APOLOGIZE

## ACT I

*(oak to willow)*

It's I, your gnarled accuser, here to scold.  
What REALLY do you know of earth and sky?  
Which different raindrops can you classify?  
How many kinds of dung identify?  
From too much staring at the shapes of winds,  
You're blinder than a stump to honest mold,  
Gall, mildew, all true tree-reality.  
Mad bird-cursed shaker of obstreperous crest,  
Listening as if to song yet bare of nest,  
Roost only of mist from whom all wings take wing:  
Even our God, the Weather, you deny;  
You blossom when you feel like blossoming,  
In a blasphemingly eternal spring.  
We have a word for such un-treelike stunts.  
We call them SABOTAGE. Since well-meant hints  
Have failed, permit the frankness of the old;  
    The grove agrees it's time you're told:  
Your chance of passing next week's Woodlore Test  
    Is—bear it oakly—not the best.  
You know the price! The beaver-foreman claims  
He needs just one more trunk to mend his dams.

## ACT II

(*willow to oak*)

Mad? No, I'm madness maddened

(—into truth).

When groves are mute, when outward wings are south,

Hear—can't you hear?—the humming in my sap,

Cascades more lyrical than any lark.

Your "test"? The holy winds—for love of me

Whose blindness dreams them into visibility—

Will test your trunk with choice typhoons;

They'll stretch you with a little thunderclap

Before the foreman's tedious cuspid zeal.

(*thunder offstage; crash; willow solo*)

Such zephyrs are the moods we willows feel.

The velvet bells of willowdom can peal

Earthquakes far-off to match my faintest sigh.

All far-off passions vibrate through my bark:—

From outside through?,

from inside through?,

am I

The echo or the strummer of earth's tunes?

### ACT III

*(spotlight on willow's soliloquy; in background, beavers in over-alls drag away storm-felled oak; stage floor as planetary globe; arched blue leaf overhead as sky)*

Alone less sure of answers than at war.  
Mere echo (—strummer?), mad (—or wild with truth?),  
By contours of the winds lured far too far,  
I'm left behind when even God flies south  
(If "God" means all the climate I ignore).  
Alone with hints of hints. The world's a burr  
I'm stuck to. Dropping. Quick!, grow meanings back.  
Back, back; drop upward. Certainty's a rock  
Too lichen-slippery for a root's attack.  
There's one blue leaf: big mask;—it mocks, but I'll  
Know answers when it falls; can wait; meanwhile,  
To show mere sky I'm not its servitor,  
I'm burnt by snow and drunk on drouth  
And serve the inner Weather of my core.

## DOLCE OSSESSIONE

Will no one watch me? Look!, I'll dance on thread  
Or hold my breath for cameras till I burst.  
Step close, please; see, I'll pick your pockets first  
And shine—like truth?, like lies?—and then drop dead.  
Pathfinder, poacher, voodoo god, and quack:  
My names, unending as an almanac,  
Spin round me like a madman's spelling-bee.  
I am the prodigal who won't come back;

Phobic of wheels, I'll hide beneath the sea.

The sea! What beast existences I'll choose!  
At first I'll curl in wombs of shells and doze  
For years and years in tepid, crooning dark.  
I'll urge Obsession on: an eel, I'll swim  
To every far Sargasso of my whim.  
When I hear bathers laugh, I'll be a shark.

A flame-scaled trout, I'll shimmer through your nets—  
Like lies?, like truth?—and gasp on fatal sands.  
Trailed fawning by lascivious lean-ribbed cats,  
What child will scoop me up,  
what pudgy hands?

## THE PLANTED SKULL

*"Toute forme créée, même par l'homme, est immortelle. Car la forme est indépendante de la matière, et ce ne sont pas les molécules qui constituent la forme."*

(Baudelaire, *Mon Cœur Mis à Nu*)

### I

The night he died, earth's images all came  
To gloat in liberation round his tomb.  
Now vengeful colors, stones, and faces dare  
To argue with his metaphor;  
And stars his fancy painted on the skies  
Drop down like swords  
to pierce his too wide eyes.

### 2

Words that begged favor at his court in vain—  
Lush adverbs, senile rhymes in tattered gowns—  
Send notes to certain exiled nouns  
And mutter openly against his reign.  
While rouged clichés hang out red lights again,  
Hoarse refugees report from far-flung towns  
That exclamation-marks are running wild  
And prowling half-truths carried off a child.



## 3

But he lives on in Form, and Form shall shatter

This tuneless mutiny of Matter.

His bones are dead; his voice is horribly strong.

Those famed vibrations of life's dancing dust,

Whose thrice-named pangs are "birth" and "death"  
and "lust,"

Are but the spilt iambics of his song.

Scansion of flesh in endless ebb and flow,

The drums of duty and renown's great gong—

Mere grace-notes of that living thousand-year

Tyrannic metronome whose every gear

Is some shy craftsman buried long ago.

What terror crowns the sweetness of all song?

## 4

What hardness leaps at us from each soft tune

And hammers us to shapes we never planned?

This was a different dying from our own.

Call every wizard in the land—

Bell, book, and test tube; let the dark be rife

With every exorcism we command.

In vain. This death is stronger than our life.

## 5

In vain we drive our stakes through such a haunter  
 Or woo with spiced applaudings such a heart.  
 His news of April do but mock our Winter  
 Like maps of heaven breathed on window-frost  
 By cruel clowns in codes whose key is lost.  
 Yet some serenity in our rage has guessed  
 That we are being blessed and blessed and blessed  
 When least we know it and when coldest art  
     Seems hostile,  
         useless,  
             or apart.

## 6

Not worms, not worms in such a skull  
 But rhythms, rhythms writhe and sting and crawl.  
 He sings the seasons round, from bud to snow.  
 And all things are because he willed them so.

## GLADNESS ODE

Because you made me glad, I was the net.  
"Why do you haunt me?" asked the midnight lake.  
    "To fish," I said, "that rounded fire.  
    Am not afraid to fall."

No, though that halo moved and moved and moved,  
It could not hide from me for all its slyness.  
    (Beneath the waters warningly  
    Moon's Icaruses sprawl.)

High watchers glowed their pity on the lake:  
"To wear mere mirrored circle like a crown,  
    Is it for this the young men drown?"  
    But I, being net, must haul.

Before you made me glad, I feared such splashing;  
Futile invoker then: "Dive me-ward, moon."  
    But now it's I who dive defiant  
    Cold curves like a ball.

The lake sang out in grace-notes scrawled by stars.  
I was the net, and all my strands were glad.  
    I pulled the moon out of the water;  
    It wasn't heavy at all.



## IV

### GROTESQUES



"I'll honor gaucheness anywhere I find it."

—from "Sleepdancers" (page 77)

"Look out, crocodiles are lying in wait for you"

—sign at the very fashionable  
Uganda Golf Club, South Africa.



## HOMEcoming

*(a charade on hedonistic "civilized" materialism and  
its eventual purgatory through moral isolation)*

My seven sons came back from Indonesia.  
Each had ruled an atoll twenty years alone.  
Twenty years of loneliness, twenty years of craziness,  
Of hell's and Eden's silence on an exiled coral throne.  
My six grunting sons had forgotten what a language is;  
My seventh was a warlock, chanting every language known.

My seven sunburnt sons arrived at the airport.  
The airport had a banner up. Its words were "WELCOME  
HOME."

The mayor made a speech, and the virgins rainbowed over  
them

The many-tongued hooray of confetti's polychrome.  
But, though seven new Rolls-Royces sped them richly to  
my parlor,  
They only filed their long sharp teeth; the warlock's were  
afoam.

The day before my seven sons returned from atoll-loneliness,  
The butler starched his livery to welcome them in style;  
"Thé dansant for the young masters?" gushed the house-  
maid, strewing doilies;

I bought my sons a set of Proust to titillate their guile.  
My seven Dresden China cups were waiting, hot with tea;  
And all was ready as my sons tramped in. They didn't smile.

"You homesick boys from far-off Indonesia,  
Relax and romp," I said, "and know you're loved.  
It's true that twenty years alone with coral  
Is not God's hand at its most velvet-gloved.  
But let's test your sense of humor; don't be morbid;  
I'll get tantrums if my welcome is rebuffed."

Did they listen? No, they only watched the seventh . . .  
Till he made a kind of signal. Then they roared and went  
amok.

Two swung from chandeliers and pounced on the butler.  
Two held the maid down, and clawed off her smock.  
Two ate the Proust set. "Be careful, kids," I wheedled;  
"Romp all you like but spare my teacups any shock.

"I can buy you chubby housemaids by the dozen.  
You can eat a butler, even eat a book.  
But whoever chips—no matter who—my china,  
He'll get magicked back to nature's loneliest nook."  
"No matter who?" the warlock asked—and tripped me  
Right across my magic teacups. I awoke

On this hellish, Eden-beautied reef of coral  
In a perfect climate full of perfect food,  
Where my sense of humor's tested by the silence  
And I've nothing else to do but fish and brood.  
"Sons, come back and get me out of Indonesia!"  
But, of course, they couldn't hear me. No one could.



## SAGA

(pre-Columbian runic rhythms)

### I

You must walk the plank.  
I can guess why you're not in a hurry.  
    *(You must walk the plank.)*  
While you walk, I'll creak you my story  
    —*(You must walk the plank.)*—  
Of my rise from old wood to new glory.  
    *(You must walk the plank.)*  
You will hear only me till the hop.  
    *(You must walk the plank.)*  
Take pride in my rise as you drop.

### 2

Vinland the Good!  
I grew old, I grew big by her sea.  
    The salt-men came.  
Honor they brought to me.  
    From all the grove  
I was chosen as gallows-tree.  
    Years flew by,  
More swift than the crows on my fruit,  
    Till the year I screamed  
With the doom of an axe at my root.

## 3

Thankless thanes.  
 I had served with such loyal joy.  
     Was felled because  
 Had frightened the milksop boy  
     Of a doting jarl.  
 The dotings began to cloy  
     When the gloating babe—  
 Did I ask him to watch so near?—  
     Was crushed by my crash.  
 I was sawed to serve as his bier.

## 4

Years crawled by,  
 More slow than the worms in my fruit,  
     Till coffin-ghouls  
 Smashed me to look for loot.  
     Then chapmen came:  
 "This lid will stanch our boat."  
     Not quite. The leak  
 I wrought proclaimed I frowned  
     On lovers of trade.  
 The only man not drowned—

## 5

—Was a thief in the brig  
Who clung to my side while they sank.

I wrought him dreams  
Till he rose to a pirate-chief's rank.

He knighted me  
Death's epicure: Sir Plank.

I wrought revolt;  
He walked me, too. How sweet  
Are men's last squeals,  
The fears I can taste through their feet.

## 6

Gallows and crash,  
Coffin and treacherous leak.  
Not bad in their way.  
But these diving-board days are my peak.

*(You must walk the plank.)*

Every man's tread is unique:

Some grudging, some gay;

Some bouncing, some needing a shove.

*(Here's goodbye; here's the edge of the edge of the plank.)*

I'll remember each footstep with love.

## THE SELF-ABUSER AND THE SUICIDE

"Society is injured not only by its open enemies but by those who neutrally ignore it, intending to injure nobody but themselves. Self-murder and similarly even self-abuse are an insidious, unconscious conspiracy against all those co-operative and fruit-bearing values that the letters Y and M and C and A have come to mean to us."—from *A Blunt Sermon For Worried Boys*.

"A. von Winkelried, nat. hero of Switz.; at bat. of Sempach, in fight for indep., opened breach in enemy forces by gathering spears into own breast; semi-legendary."—from *The New Concise Pictorial Encyclopedia*, p. 60.

S: Now hands can build. We freed them to. We targets.

S-A: Like quilled Sebastian whom the perverts pray to?  
Pin-cushions in some cosmic vaudeville,  
Is that the role you'd cast saint-sinners for?  
No, let me rot with dignity instead.

S: Not Sebastian. Winkelried as symbol.  
Except for him, those decent Swiss would die  
On spears of accusation. All the "they"  
We're brother to, are shielded by our guilt.

S-A: What's guilt or non-guilt? They stoned me, and it  
hurt.  
I never asked for either their love or their rope.

- S: Two guilts: Cain and Narcissus: I and you.  
Narcissus murders love, the "we" of selves.  
Cain murders life, the "I" of selves (theirs first;  
At last himself). What crimes but both of these  
Are anywhere? And these are everywhere.
- S-A: Each for himself. My crime blighted their seed.  
When I withered their crops, they lectured me on  
"love".  
Cant! It's their breakfast foods, not love, they missed.
- S: It's not what men do with love in the sun in the hay.  
It's what men dream to do with an axe in the cellar.  
Some one's to blame for that dream: . . . why not we?  
But after the rope, they brought incense and flowers.
- S-A: They brought  
You, found in a ditch, to this second death.  
For suicide, Cain, their penalty is death.
- S: That's how we became their gods.
- S-A: Old bones in the rain.
- S: Mine is the moral guilt: "thou shalt not kill"—  
Turned inward by a proud, weak, magic hate.  
Yours is the social guilt: "shalt love thy neighbor."
- S-A: Us loved what neighbor? Hanging us, unchanged  
themselves.
- S: Our death their life. Proclaim: let self-accusing  
No longer stop the building of the world.

- S-A: Your "builders" hanged us both from this same  
branch—  
You dead already, I to lovers dead—  
Hanged us so intimate, so side by side  
That our skeletons must either war or kiss.  
. . . Warring or kissing, all's the same to those  
Who think we're dancing when the breezelings poke  
us.
- S: Ten years we've danced now, since the Sacrifice.  
The whole town gala for that celebration.  
How they needed us! In order to be just.
- S-A: Or unjust. Cain-Narcissus either way.
- S: And nothing staler than our ten-years'-quarrel  
In which we tried by kicks and hoots to settle  
Which one is viler: your disgrace or mine.
- S-A: Yours! Yours forever! Murder of the self  
*More* vile than selfish isolated self.
- S: *Less* vile! More clean! More honorable an ending.
- S-A: Yours viler. Here's for ten new years of war.
- S: Of kicking at your bones until they fall.
- S-A: Till yours fall first.
- S: I'll rot your rope right through.

S-A: I'll rattle your ribs. I'll train my choir of  
Black doves to croak your shame inside your skull.

S: But if we try the other kind of dance?

S-A: And banish thoughts alike of war and shame?

S: And say there is no shame at all? There's splendor!

S-A: Cain and Narcissus, equal in the splendor  
Of sacrifice and equal in compassion.  
Compassion for each other.

S: But chief of all,  
Compassion for our killers,—whom we rescued  
To let the building of the world go on.

S-A: Kiss and no war, because the same sick worms  
Of shy intimidated tenderness  
Gnaw both our hearts. The kissless love themselves  
To death—into a noose.

S: Then kiss because—

S-A: Because?—

S: Because like all the builders of the world—

S-A: Because like all your "they," your "decent Swiss"—

S: Because like any seed that ever sprouted—

S-A: Because like any sprout that ever wilted—

S: Because like dreams that take the risk of action—

S-A: Because like every act mixed up with earth;  
Involved with air; dreamed by mortality—

S: Because we both have love, and guilty hands.



## RIPENESS IS ALL

(pastorale for mine-layers)

Through nights of slanting rain  
Marchers are planting pain;  
    Gardeners in boots  
Plant tender seeds of mines  
Where the dimmed flashlight shines,  
Nursing the wire-vines,  
    Hiding the roots.

Boys in green raincoats scamper  
Where grass will soon be damper  
    When ripeness murders.  
How fast the seeds grow high!  
Blossoming, towards the sky  
Pain's gaudy petals fly,  
    White with red borders.

## BIRTH OF A FASCIST: THE BANKCLERK'S VISION OF FRUSTRATION

"Having stoned the windows of a Roman Catholic church, touched off a fiery cross in a Jewish cemetery, horsewhipped three Negroes, and sung '*America The Beautiful*,' the members voted to call it a night and adjourn."—from the minutes of the Cherokee Chapter of "Liberty's Unsleping Watchmen, Inc., a Fraternal Order," December, 1946.

### I

I could, I could—O I see that dawn—  
Could seize a foaming bison by the mane  
And trot (past dinosaurs) upon its back  
Through swamps connecting Africa and Spain.  
I'd think up springtime rites to spawn more grain,  
Pray to black rocks where waves are wild,  
Rip the grass skirts off cave-girls so beguiled  
By all the daring jokes I crack  
That they'd just clap their hands like a charmed child.

Zooming through history, a thousand years an hour,  
 I'd climb Olympus and look down and glower.  
 For fun, I'd glow with monstrous superstitions  
 Which I would satiate fanatically—  
 "You to the lions! you to lash and galley!"—  
 On all who doubt my niftiest Sacred Missions;  
 Then free the guiltiest if I like his smile.  
 I'd set a court up for a little while;  
 I'd make sly hunchbacks my Prime Ministers,  
     Knight all my oiliest flatterers,  
 Tax serfs to pay my bogus alchemists,  
 And taunt Professors and dress apes as priests.

## 3

Whoever giggles at my scowls,  
 Gets locked into a tiny cage  
 And poked with sticks until he howls.  
 The day my rebel satraps on the moon  
 Fly down in rockets to dispute my throne,  
 I'll turn my death-ray on till they give in.  
     Then I'll be terrible in my rage.  
 I? Well, why not? I bet I would have been.

## 4

"Choose!" begged my angel; "Choose to be born at  
that dawn."

But I chose my white collar . . . but listen, I've things  
to explain:

There shall come for you all the time of the snapping  
of nerves;

Mutiny in an unexplored cell of your brain;

The unguessed T.N.T. in a jaded yawn;

Power, power skidding at curves.

## 5

I was a child and life was toffee

In which my teeth would munch deep marks, I swore.

But then I chose and woke—my angel shrieked with fright—

Chose wrong and woke in this delicatessen store,

Dunking stale doughnuts in half-heated coffee.

Heads will roll in the sand in my dreams tonight.

## HOME, JAMES!

Time's tumbling curtain means: "Finita è—".  
Hell's jolly beavers gnaw at every sprout.  
Mankind's last headline calls it doomsday-day.  
The sun stands still and wilts in every ray;  
Sometimes a comet tries to run away  
("Snuffed trying to escape," the Agents gloat);  
Sometimes a planet seems to try to pray.

*Now . . . postponed . . . dreams . . . shout.*  
The hot and disappointed lipsticks pout.  
Apocalyptic apoplexies fray  
The nerves of Cronos like a gaffer's gout.  
Not ants but grasshoppers have won the bout  
Because there is no piper left to pay.  
Who disconnected breath from clay?

Hey,  
*Who . . . pulled the . . . socket . . . out?*

## AND VEGETABLES

And! And! The all too And, the also-rans.  
Is "still life" still? How gray are kitchen greens?  
Turnips are stagehands (a ROSE is the queen of the scenes);  
Use them for usefulness; dry them in footnotes or cans.

But an And is a brightness, green red yellow.  
Parsleys so tender their tendrils flutter.  
Lumbering fat-cheeked pumpkins, bovine-mellow.  
Stone-hearted olives as con-man-smoothie as butter.

The squat and boisterous potato-flower,  
Most greedy of the throats that poach the sky,  
Stuffed with starch and solar power,  
Loads its abysmal fruits until they fly

Open like bombs the day the forks descend.  
That old officiousness of bees  
Serves us this plate of calm-round-perfect peas,  
Polished a thousand years by gene and wind.

Sapless, in many a "Golden Treasury" pressed,  
The two-dimension ROSE of love sleeps on,  
While living Indies wake the West  
With prodding coffee, jabs of cinnamon.

# FIVE CUTE PRACTICAL JOKES TO PLAY ON TOY SOLDIERS

## 1 PRE-ATOMIC

Light opera—harmless—makes Act One  
Twenty-five million years of fun:  
He shoots all right but never kills.  
(Except, of course, individuals).

## 2 CLICHÉ

Now that his fate is mass-demise,  
There's one old saw he should revise.  
Flies die like men. Not men like flies.

## 3 PREFABRICATED MORTALITY

How do I *keep* a toy a toy?  
There's a built-in safety-device I employ.  
Revolt? Their clockwork lacks physique  
To storm Olympus and stop the trick  
That makes inside of them built-in hoaxes  
All the time pack them back in boxes.

#### 4 "L'AMOR CHE MUOVE"

If I'm a swatter of two-legged flies  
As they are swatters of flies,  
I'd rather find lovers than haters,  
I'd rather swat once than swat twice.  
Of lovers, I'd rather find huggers  
Than huddlers platonic as ice.  
For he who finds truly-true lovers,  
A glued pair of hugging-hot lovers,  
Is lucky of swat, O is lucky:  
Swats two without swatting twice.

#### 5 WORLD BROTHERHOOD

But there's one thing that's better than love.  
That's meetings. It's meetings I love.  
To step down on many is better—  
When whole bunches of vermin chatter—  
Even better than stepping on two.  
Tonight is a peace-rally calling them all,  
Tonight will be the end of them all,  
The end of the world at my shoe.  
Name of the mass-meeting all will be at?  
"In Honor Of Human Dignity."  
. . . Or something like that.



## WHAT THE HOLY GIRL IN THE HOSPITAL SAID

*"The Saki gathered her the night he went  
Across the grass and that sad moon arose."*

—from the Persian

They ratted on me, she and father,  
Cause my Bible-quoting sessions  
Must of been an awful bother  
When folks was sleeping after passions.

That's why he let her lies persuade him  
I tried to hang myself with garters.  
He loved me more; so mother made him  
Lock me up with all these Martyrs.

Them days when hearts are cold, he's worried  
That much he springtimes to rejoice us.  
Don't listen to her; God is horrid  
Only to you who sass my Voices.

He'll pay you back; he'll up and 'spurn' you.  
Just like the Bible says, he'll 'smite' you.  
He'll send the 'quenchless flame' to burn you;  
He'll send the 'deathless worm' to bite you,

Bite you hard in tender places  
Till you belly-ache for pardon.  
He'll 'quoth': "Your only chance for grace is  
From this lamb you set a guard on."

How you'll crawl to me for blessing!  
Then I'll prove you I'm no sorehead.  
"Please grow wings," I'll holler, kissing  
Each upon his bloody forehead,

Saying, "Love's your *only* duty.  
Love till it hurts and make it snappy."  
Everything'll shine with beauty!  
Everyone'll be so happy!

Like skyrocket no cop can fether,  
You, too, can bust from graves to heaven,  
If you'll treat drunks and flowers better.  
Gee, I *wisht* you'd try believing.

But if you hear me and still doubt,  
You'll be sorry for your laughter.  
I'm not telling; you'll Find Out  
Soon enough in the hereafter.

1935

## THE SLEEPDANCERS

One crunch of fangs is all the thanks I'd get,  
Were I to join the waltz behind their bars.  
I tried to look away; but shan't forget  
This circus dance of sixteen mangy bears.

Their jowls, like good sports in a comic paper,  
Grin their Indignity. Explore that word.  
Your "injured and insulted," here they caper.  
I wish I really thought they were absurd.

And do *you* think so, snout-chained soul of man,  
You audience whose paws erupt that rumpus?  
You middle-aged and grouchy, gypped of fun.  
You growlers all, inelegantly pompous.

And tell me, do they sleepdance, just like—you?  
Nightly do they keep step, the whole sixteen,  
When on the roof their plumpness teeters through  
The canvas of the carnival-canteen?

Beneath the roof, their Chainer is carousing.  
If he but guessed what bear-hugs overhead  
Flatten the moon they fly to when they're drowsing! . . .  
Suppose they crash? Who shrives bears when they're dead?

Shall cats and curs, that cringed to watch them lope,  
Now dice to divvy and lug home their fat?  
If I'm around, I'll put a stop to that.  
I'll honor gaucheness anywhere I find it

And the deep sadness of a shaggy hope.



V

IRREVERENCES





## BAD NEWS FROM RATISBON TO BROWNING

Feeling the frog in the throat,  
Panting: "The snail's on the thorn  
Impaled, and all's wrong with the world,"  
Smiling the horse dropped dead.

## PRAYER

(as Thomas Hardy might write it today)

Slowly bending round the global  
Treadmill of man's soul,  
Solely spending Charon's obol  
After all that toil,  
Why have we to tread at all?  
Holy Juggler of earth's snowball  
Who, unmoved, made planets mobile,  
Be less nimble, be less noble,  
Drop them, let them fall.

Larcenist who'll steal our *hybris*  
When we're drugged with death,  
Arsonist whose spark amoebas  
Fanned with upward breath,  
Why hast housed that fire with  
Hearts half black, half white like zebras,  
Heads made light by *Cuba libres*,  
Too few Solomons and Shebas,  
Too much mask and myth?

Dutiful racers round rotundas,  
Why—where—do we go?  
Beautiful faces drowned in sand is  
All we are or know.  
God, for God's sake, let us go;  
Keep us not with dangled candies;  
Only way to understand us  
Lonely pacers on verandahs  
Is—let go, let go!



1912\*-1952,  
FULL CYCLE

\*Events of 1912, the key year: *New Age* starts publishing Hulme's essays; Imagist nucleus founded (Pound, H. D., Aldington); *Poetry: A Magazine Of Verse* founded by Harriet Monroe (to whom Pound in 1914 sends Eliot's "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," written 1910-11); October 1912, the American-verse number of Harold Monroe's *Poetry Review* (W. C. Williams, Pound); symbolic clash of the simultaneous 1912 publication of *Georgian Poetry* and Pound's *Ripostes*.



## 1912-1952, FULL CYCLE

### I. LOVE SONG OF PRUFROCK JUNIOR

Must all successful rebels grow  
From toreador to Sacred Cow?  
What cults he slew, his cult begot.  
"In my beginning," said his Scot,  
"My end;" and aging eagles know  
That 1912 was long ago.  
Today the women come and go  
Talking of T. S. Eliot.

II. INSCRIBED FOR YOUR BEDSIDE  
"GLOSSARY OF THE NEW CRITICISM"

Here's the eighth form of ambiguity:  
The *new* philistia loves "obscurity,"—  
And only we still dare to hate it  
Because a *texte* without a Muse in  
Is but a snore and an allusion.  
Well then, let's turn the tables hard:  
The snobs all snubbed, the baiters baited,  
The explicators explicated,  
And avant-garde the new rearguard.

### III. FROM THE SUBLIME TO THE METICULOUS IN FOUR STAGES

DANTE: We were God's poets.

BURNS: We were the people's poets.

MALLARMÉ: We were poet's poets.

TODAY (preening himself): Ah, but *we* are critic's poets.

IV. EPITAPH FOR THE NOUVEAUX NEW CRITICS,  
HUGH KENNER, E TUTTI QUESTI

Cliché is dead, long live cliché,  
And in old fields new Georgians play.  
O miglior fabbro and O mandarin,  
You who skinned Georgians like a tangerine,  
Two Hercules who on your natal day  
Strangled these snakes of cliché-pandering,  
These same that now through backstairs wander in:  
Let not (while death-knells from Kinkanja<sup>1</sup> ring)  
The pedant town of Alexander in.  
From kitsch the nineteenth century banned her in,  
You freed our Muse. For what? Was Queen Victoria  
Primmer than précieux new "Prohibitoria"<sup>2</sup>?  
Loving your ART and not your fleas, we pray:  
May time protect you from your protégés.

Time's up when pupils' pupils school the school.  
Cow? Bad enough! But sacred—calf?  
Now that the cup of insolence is full,—  
By God, who'll start a brandnew Nineteen Twelve?

<sup>1</sup>Cf. not *The Golden Bough* but *The Cocktail Party*, American edition, p. 174.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Louis Rubin in *Hopkins Review*, summer 1950: "He has twice criticized the award of the 1949 Bollingen Prize to Pound's *Pisan Cantos*, on grounds both of form and content. Either he must repent, and publicly, or resign himself to a prominent and permanent position in the Index Prohibitorium of the New Criticism."

SEHNSUCHT MEINES AHNEN,  
DES VENEZIANISCHEN GESANDTEN

Da sandte er, der sendende Gesandte,  
Sein inniges Leben, das nach aussen strebt.  
Mit einer Geste gähnte der Galante;  
Er seufzte wie erkennende Verkannte,  
Sacht bebend wie ein Bebender, der bebt,

Doch ernst wie junge Mädchen, die erschrecken,  
Wenn wilde Winde ihre Brüste wecken.

## HEHRE SENDUNG

Ich trat als Erstling keusch in eure runde •  
Halb herrscherdämon und halb nachtigall •  
Die ur-uhr schlug des Dionysos stunde •  
Nun tönt das erz der erde wie kristall  
(Ein werwolf stöhnt in grausem widerhall).

## DER SEHER DES (hoffentlich) LETZTEN REICHES

Der seher aber • feile tafeln brechend •  
Mahnt seine jünger • schlicht und streng versprechend  
(O hört ihr nicht den frühlingsgott der fluren?)  
Dass ritterfreundschaft hehrer sei als huren •  
Dass sterne jauchzen wenn auf stolzen bühnen  
Wir alten frevel grausamsüss entsünnen •  
Aus leichen schaffend mit verklärtem schauer  
Ein drittes Reich von tausendjähriger dauer  
Wo dolch und flöte beide heilig sind:  
Der teutsche kriegler und das tanzend kind.



A GNARLED OLD CRAB-APPLE TREE  
ANSWERS JOYCE KILMER

I'll bow my trunk to true simplicity  
But not to folksy simperings that drool.  
Poems are made by trees like me,  
But only God can make a fool.

*à la manière de P. V.* (in his most pretentious and  
humorless style):

## THE CALVING ICEBERG'S DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL

Is she the Nome and adverb of "to freeze"?  
No Jason ever melts such Fleece.  
No unicorn impales her unwed earth  
Though seismographs record such birth.

An almost-Palestinian hush belies  
The almost-island of such ice—  
As if she prayed as Sinai's mountain did  
And sprouted saints as other deserts do.  
Or Gothic: like a God-raped caryatid

Tingling with terrors gargoyles never knew.

VI  
LYRICS





## BEACH SONG

### I

Sen . . . ti . . . men . . . tal summerbeach!  
Let me have fiddler crabs around me now  
And only the noble sigh of dunes.

*(Languors and lethargies and mellowness)*

Where tide meets toe, let turtles and blind men  
Drone me that aloofest music  
Whose only meaning is that warmth is good.

*(Mellifluous, mellifluous, mellifluous)*

Refrain of the lukewarm surf  
With no meaning but softness and sadness:  
"Oh and ah." Say it again:

*(Je sais que la douleur est l'unique noblesse)*

"Oh and ah," the gentleness before the cold.

Sen . . . ti . . . men . . . tal summerbeach!  
 Let loping winds come lolling round me now,  
 These mixers up of echoes of girls' locks.

*(Languors and lethargies and mellowness)*

And now the music of that secret love-bed  
 Inside of shells  
 That ebbs to grateful sleep.

*(Mellifluous, mellifluous, mellifluous)*

Oh and ah, what weight of sand on clams,  
 Without whose brooding (nobody knows this)  
 The world would cool and stop.

*(Je sais que la douleur est l'unique noblesse)*

Oh and ah, the guardian hum beneath the sand.

Singsob me, senti-soothy beach!

Glide, seagull, glide forebodings all away.

Eye: tan me, tan me, do not quiz me so.

*(Languors and lethargies and mellowness)*

I came here to jubilate

While the sun spills satin.

What feather fell to stop my joy-song?

*(Mellifluous, mellifluous, mellifluous)*

Oh and ah, a black

Feather from the long

Cold after the satin.

*(Je sais que la douleur est l'unique noblesse)*

Oh and ah, after the futile sun.

## LIKE A SITTING BREEZE

(goodbye l'art-pour-l'art)

It was my cruel crossroads: duel or fall.  
Say: "loveliest of trees, the cherry now."  
O say it: "because I do not hope to turn again,"  
Therefore I'll choose no farther than these petals fall.

It was my cruel hour. Choice is now,  
And neither way will lead to Loveliest again.  
I want to stop. Stop here where the petals fall.  
Suspend me in this choiceless Now.

If all the spilt petals could climb like crabs up the tree again,  
If hoverers could wait where they want and never ever fall,  
I'd stay. Like a sitting breeze, I would. But (petal-treading  
now)  
I'm off to the lonely duel by the water's edge again.



## ALGIERS IN WARTIME

(the sergeant remembers 1943)

### *I*

Behold Algiers, Algiers who tells the waters,  
"My pride is: you can never wash me pure.  
Fondle me, waves, to make the world unclean.  
Adore me: I am wistful and corrupt  
And melt with gentleness toward all who bruise me,  
And all my pearls are beautiful and glass  
And all for sale, and I adore myself."

The whore, the whore! Behold Algiers the whore,  
Open to all as ports are to whole fleets,  
Flat on her back upon the soft hot beach  
That gets into the shoes of stevedores  
And is to war a base, to her a bed.  
Then from her port the shorelines both sprawl out  
Like pudgy thighs; the one kicks carelessly  
Westward past Môle de Pêche; the other twists  
Tensely into the sky toward Hussein Dey.  
Above them, both her hills, at El-Biar  
And Hydra, rise as if she filled her lungs  
To bursting with Sahara-drowsy air,  
Then held her breath—they swell there in suspense,  
Freed by no sigh.

Between them lives no heart.  
Only her port is living. Here there writhe  
The dapper souls she lures and never lusts for,  
*Les officiers* imperially slender—  
Perfumed, good God!—with fragile little canes,  
Their pockets full of gloves and paper money.  
They enter her like courtiers, furtively.  
For them the whore Algiers becomes a sickness:  
Exile from Paris, botched careers, a doom.  
But war's plain soldier, Zouave, Limey, Dogface,  
His pockets loud with sous and pennies, enters  
Like a contagious health, all stride and pride.  
For him she aches as ports ache for the ocean.  
And she's all his; he grabs her; she is his.

## THE INSULTED AND INJURED

### CANDOR:

Their trouble is their being more than monkeys,  
Too quickly more and not quite more enough.  
A breed that won't concede its role is slapstick,  
Declines to melodrama: heartfelt, hackneyed.  
Embarrassing to watch: that bathos-posture,  
Always that dark-night-of-the-soul of theirs.  
And prayers, and lusts, and "nerves," and "moral qualms"! (And what they think are subtle wincings.) No, I  
Prefer a trained seal. No night of the soul from *him*.

### COMPASSION:

Stop. I indict you for yawning at trapped eyes.  
O sweet, fake, trapped courage of  
The pain of the title of the bad painting by Etty:  
"Youth at the prow and Pleasure at the helm."  
Or music with titles like "Sur la glace à Sweet-Briar"!  
No, no, their trouble's this: of all the beasts,  
Only they found out there's no such thing as winners.  
All lose, the hurt ones or the personages,  
All, all, the waifs or colonels both in tears.

### CANDOR:

More of your—haha—"tragic figures," eh?  
The alley-kitten, or the dear old gent.  
Both age as outcasts whom the young cast out.  
Act Five: mope me your favorite wounds again:  
Young Fifi or old Gaga, both humili—

COMPASSION:

This is not sweet: to die humiliated.  
Let us wring hands and chirp, "Unbearable!"

CANDOR:

Well wrung! Don't stop, go on, all over again.  
*Playnte* of the sensitive whore. Go on from there—

COMPASSION:

*Chaunte* of the pensioned colonel at the pub.  
(The kind of Sir whom, if there still were housemaids,  
They'd feel like making almost curtseys to.)  
"Now dogs are fat," the petulant colonel quavers;  
"They've no more carriage-wheels to run between."

CANDOR:

The Harrow boys then wink and feed him beers  
And urge: "Write letters to *The Times*, of course:  
'What crass betrayal of quaint ceremony!'"  
And he all elegant and all aghast.

COMPASSION:

And I can think of other ends than this.  
And I can think up other tears than his.  
What can the colonel's Winter-shiver tell  
Her crumpled Spring? Her softness crushes stone,  
Cold as the morgue whose slab she sleeps upon.  
Indignity! Indignity! Indig—

CANDOR:

Both lose. You fuss and twitter fecklessly.  
All over again, chirp what you could not bear.

COMPASSION:

He quavers, for he isn't well at all:  
"Poor fat brave dogs! Poor vanished carriage-wheels!  
The Situation is deterior—"

CANDOR:

The undergraduates fill his glass and giggle:  
"DEAL with it, colonel! Colonel, DEAL with it!  
Deal with it like that sepoy mutiny.  
YOUR situation is deterior—"

COMPASSION:

But I can mourn still sicker ends than this.  
But I can think of deaths far-off from his.  
What can a pensioned Winter-shiver tell  
An unbloomed Spring? Her softness crushes stone,  
Cold as the river she was burning on.

CANDOR:

Such, sick of such, get sickest to get cured.

COMPASSION:

"Home James!" he once could order, or claims he could.  
So might she bid the river: "To the morgue!"

CANDOR:

Well, where do you think she'd float to? Camelot?

## GROVE IN DROUGHT

This was the Easter when it rained so little  
That all the olive groves were grimed with dust  
Along the road. The sapless twigs were brittle,  
Ceding, like wires yielding glint to rust,

Their hoard of stored up sun and all their greenness—  
Except one crest, whose brightness drained its root.  
Here clay had pushed beyond all clay's uncleanness  
And then, exhausted, withered without fruit.

## THE PAINTBRUSH OF THE OLD ONES

When membrane of milady's sleep  
Doth learn the courtesy of how to fray  
As nobly as the pounded ice  
Relinquishes its immemorial pool,  
    Then come the gallopers of sleep.  
    No plummet asks how deep they rule  
    Who once rode ponies out of stone-age skies  
    To hunt the mammoth for his wool.  
On caves of her they paint their fuzzy prey.  
On membrane of milady's sleep.



## DIES ILLA\*

\*Written 1932 as highschool assignment; published 1936 in slightly revised form in *Harvard Advocate*; again revised in 1952, as a curiosity "twenty years after."

*'Dies irae, dies illa  
Solvat saeculum in favilla'*

Everywhere

Foreknowing lurks unblent behind earth's blendings.  
It shivers—even in spring's guileless oases—  
At hard-riding portents, saddled like thistledown  
On winds that have strayed in many places,  
Seen many forgotten beginnings and thrown  
The dust of many great and little endings  
    Into the air.

Out of that air,

Death is the lung that breathes us when we breathe,  
Night's feelable scent, the red shadow of every green wreath.  
Like a runaway outlaw nerve, the twitch of his hints  
Signals and signals our brain-cells with  
Awareness. In sun's sweetest entanglements,  
In its pressure of limbs and fields and sunshine, death  
    Is purring there.

And his stare  
Outstares us from every thicket, deadpan, unblinking.  
My dear, we have come to a spell-bound place,  
Where sunflowers have eyes that follow us.  
Hurry, or twilight will yawn and swallow us.  
Hurry; we are watched by a cloud with a crafty face.  
Hurry, hurry; the sun is sinking  
And clutches your hair—

And tugs you beneath by your hair.  
Sunset-defier, O lilt of all winds, hold me so  
Close I will never let you go.  
And Because I will never let you go,  
Because this "Because" is love's true conspiracy,  
Your hair from all that clutch of things is—free.  
All sinking things but one have compassion for love,  
All but one will spare.

And Because death won't spare,  
Because it is O intolerable for love to face him  
Alone while every Spring blind weeds outrace him,  
Because this Because is the war between life and God,  
Let love not die alone; let all things die,  
A universe ambushed in one dumbfounded cry.  
On every head let death jam down his hood  
Of sickly air

Everywhere thickly.  
Then if the world—who knows?—if it ends, if it ends to-  
night,  
You will cling to me through ashes and all that thunder,  
Cling and feel safe, till hell subsides and naked heaven,  
dawn-frenzied,  
Sheds the whole sky like gauze and blazes through and  
rends it,  
Shaking our window-pane with jubilant light.  
You will blink at God and blink again and with how young  
a wonder  
Wake me quickly.

## KILROY REVISITED

### I

On Hallowe'en when dusk clogs up with ghosts,  
All Kilroys of the past come bouncing back,  
Wrenched from wherever jokes or bottles crack,  
From every hall where gorgeous boastings rant:  
Valhalla, where the nimrods of the Norse play  
Through centuries of hiccuping and horseplay;  
The Bad Lands, where the two-gunned and the tough house  
And build whole states between two bouts of rough-house.  
At each Black Sea, Kilroy greets Xenophon:  
"You, too, were footsore; and you, too, trudged on."  
When bonfire-redness ebbs, but not quite out,  
Then some, from years when "harps" were life and not  
"Poetic diction," tune their harps and chant  
This song (until dawn wipes its slate of ghosts):—

*We honor Kilroy, founder of our clans,  
 Who threw his limbs about beneath far suns  
 To make his gusto (scribbled everywhere)  
 The dignity of man's futility.  
 "Kilroy was here"—but now that "here" is there,  
 Where is the thereness of poor Kilroy now?  
 We weep for Kilroy, that great lounge; he  
 Won't sun-bathe on the under-side of lawns.  
 Friends, when with luck or dark compulsive patience  
 You find a new Pacific in your brow,  
 Gold in them hills or Martians in that star,  
 Pause meekly in your Stout Cortez elations  
 And think of Kilroy:*

*he was also thar.*

## THE TIME THE PHOTOS TURNED UP

Brittle echoed kiss that quickened our  
Ebbing cycle, see what you set stirring!  
Drowsy album stretching, snapshots whirring,  
Each face just as flat as book-pressed flower.

Every face we once as photo fondled,  
Wakes in three dimensions and is singing.  
Now we know how dozing clay was kindled  
By one warm Was of Word inthebeginning.

## MUSIC

*(lento, con molto sentimento)*

Sick earth. Shroud of air  
Sagged heavy, heavy sank despair.  
If earth could kneel! That gray cry  
Would slip away, a sort of soul, and fly  
    Outward, a  
Kind music . . . oldoldold . . . a planet's prayer.

## THE AUTUMN INSTANT: SKY AND EARTH\*

\*This replaces the now-discarded version of the same dialogue in *Strike Through The Mask*. The present version includes in part two a new stanza of eight lines.

### I SERENADE

If through a wind I ripple every tide  
With such a wave as rattles every quay,  
It is to haunt the true lost flesh they hide;  
All seas, all soils but sheathe my bride from me.

Her skirt of colored seasons crowns her thighs  
And circles round the lunar tune she sways.  
—O loose your sweet green locks with drowsy grace  
And slowly brush their warmth across my eyes.

Twisting your shoulder-blades beneath the plough  
That fondles you when apple twigs are bent,  
Deep in your hills you would not huddle so  
If you believed how sad I am you went.

Then let no princeling of the apricots  
Excite you with the ripeness of the year.  
His nectared cheeks must burst; your courtier rots;  
My snows are on his trail, will soon be here.



And yet am sun. I nibble listlessly  
A ghat of all the wives of all my whims.  
Autumnal tawny harems burn for me.  
Such games will not distract me from your limbs.

Call to me dawdlingly when summer falters.  
Attract me bitterly through molten grain.  
I am your sky; look up; my clouds are altars  
To worship you with desecrating rain.

## 2 COUNTER-SERENADE: SHE INVOKES THE AUTUMN INSTANT

Then touch the park; the leaves are stained to lure you.  
The leaves are spread on winds they fan before you.  
They drained the summer, and their veins prefer you,  
Dark with the season they are keening for.

Then bring the heavy dying they prefer.  
Each painful fruit is hanging heavier.  
Why pause when loveliness grows lonelier  
And love is just as melting as it looks?  
There's but one touch that all the ripeness lacks:  
You are the instant; you are waited for.

Then never wait when flutes of foliage bear you  
Home on the homeward tune they always bore.  
Fear not at all the twigs of flame they bear.  
These never meant to be a barrier.  
The lovely are as lonely as their gleam,  
The lonely just as loving as they seem,  
The fruits as melting as they always were:  
There is a fondling they are furtive for.

Then touch my park. The leaves have spread before you  
The green they drained, the darkness they prefer.  
Come to the leaves, reach out and touch them all.  
Bring to the smoldering year, that hovers for you,  
The hovering instant love is dawdling for:

There's not one leaf that does not long to fall.

VII  
CHILDHOOD





## CHILDHOOD

You cannot bear this silent, heavenly sadness.  
You need voluptuous, need tellurian sighs.  
Not up but down, down, earthward is your sky,  
Your own (but how to make you know?) by birth.  
There shines the park that offers you more lilacs  
Than all the arms of longing can enfold.  
And so you grow, you grope for parks while drifting  
All the while southward all unknowingly.  
Then groves more south, more slow than lukewarm breezes  
(More south, more velvet) sing you dissonances  
(More dense, more south) that cloy unbearably,  
Till every vibrant, swaying twig bends down  
Heavy with figs and with the grapes of breasts.

Such exhalation, then, of tenderness—  
Of fondling tides on crumbling promontories,  
Of shade of clouds on white young birch-bark, fleeting  
As patterns hinted on the wildest grasses  
By rims of bicycles in picnic weather—  
Slakes you to sleepiness. You snuff the sun out;  
You unroll far beaches to your chin like quilts.  
You become a *Maerchen* dreamed by the deep, cool clams,  
And by the huddling bats of timeless caves.  
Eight hundred years of this. And then a signal.  
You'll know, you'll never doubt it, you'll arise;  
And, yawning, stretch into a constellation;  
And fill the sky that has been waiting for you.



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